1817.

No. 10

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Observations

on the properties of

Nicotiana Tabacum,

as a medicine;

and

Its effects on health,

as an article of luxury.

by P. B. Tweatt.
of Virginia

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Preliminary Remarks.

In the study of medicine there is surely no one circumstance with which more perplexity is associated than the selection of a fit subject for an inaugural dissertation.

On which side soever we look, difficulties arise to the view: When deliberating on this choice, we are met by the conviction that all diseases which are interesting to the practitioner, either from their universality; their extreme violence, and intractable character, as sporadics; their frequent recurrence as Endemics or Epidemics; their uniform fatality; or from an idea of importance attached to them from some peculiarity of feature, had already attracted the attention, and elicited the skill of the most distinguished men, in different countries; and had moreover been individually made the themes of ingenious speculation by the immense number of young men who have, before us, been candidates for medical honours.

Upon the elaborate descriptions, and time-tested methods of cure already established, in many of these diseases, it would be but little short of presumption in a student of medicine, to make any animadversion; or, by an attempt to introduce innovation, promise any essential improvement.

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There are however diseases which are so completely inveloped in impenetrable obscurity as to have baffled the laborious researches of experienced and eminent sages, and, in the investigation of which, youth and inexperience would probably be as profitably employed as in the pursuit of a meteor, or in attempting to dive into the nature of electricity or gravitation.

To improve and to correct practice, are not the student's province. These considerations alone would be sufficient to induce him to leave this widely extended field; and seek refuge in one better adapted to his abilities; and that of Surgery, physiology, chemistry, materia medica &c, would, for a time appear to offer an asylum. A little reflection shows these to be equally untenable for nearly the same reasons.

Chemistry from its imperfect state, & rapidly progressive improvement, of late, would, perhaps, suit our purpose best of any of these, were it not that a difficulty of access to a wellfurnished laboratory, generally proves an insuperable barrier to a majority of students.

After what has been said, it may be asked, why I have chosen to write on tobacco? my answer is, not that it is free from the objections enumerated, but because it appeared liable

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as few as any other. It is not my expectation to influence in any considerable degree the opinions or practices of others; nor do I flatter myself that I shall hereby contribute much to the advancement of the science of medicine. The very idea of an inaugural thesis would suppress such hopes; for we all know in what estimation authority of this kind, (if I may be allowed to dignify it with the appellation, authority) is generally held. A writer of the present day, of "no humble genius", has satirically denominated theses, "the echo of the predilections of a preceptor". If I succeed in restoring some of the confidence once reposed in it, as a medicine, and of which it has, I think, been undeservedly bereft; – if what I have said be hereafter an encouragement to some one possessed of more leisure and greater experience than myself, to investigate thoroughly the merits of tobacco as a remedy in disease, & by that means, add to the comforts of mankind by mitigating or removing a single complaint, I shall have fully accomplished my end, & been more than repaid for my labour. Of the Botanical history of tobacco, & of its methods of cultivation, I shall say nothing; nor do I propose to notice its uses in the arts, believing these parts of the subject by no means legitimately connected with my present designs.

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Nicotiana Tabacum.

One of the earliest methods of acquiring a knowledge of the medicinal properties of substances was by particular observation of their sensible qualities. Hence we may judge that this plant, by its powerful smell and taste, at a very remote period, attracted the notice of inquisitive man, and designated itself as an article capable of answering valuable indications in the cure of disease. Accordingly, we find it has long since been prescribed to fulfil various, and even contradictory ends. The results of such experiments are precisely what might be anticipated from the vague & indiscriminate use of so powerful an article.

In some cases, it has fully effected all it promised; and, in others, it has either done no good, or much harm.

I hold it as a maxim in medicine, with but few exceptions, that, whatever is incapable of doing much harm, is also incapable of doing much good. Because tobacco, thus used, has proven sometimes mischievous, should we act wisely to dismiss it from our means of combating disease? I think we should rather hold it in reserve for emergencies; for the diversified experiments with it, all tend to establish, beyond a doubt, the fact that it is a medicine possessed of energetic powers, either in substance, tincture, or infusion. That these powers, ill directed,

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But is not the same equally true of almost every active medicine we have? This must be answered in the affirmative. Yet these, by a more judicious application, i.e. by ascertaining from actual experiment, as well as much observation, not only the particular diseases, but likewise the exact periods, and circumstances of these diseases, to which their powers were peculiarly adapted, have not merely regained their former reputation, but have claimed a much greater share of our commendation.
In order still farther to illustrate the truth of this statement, I will briefly mention a few of the many instances of this sort. Opium was, at one time, prescribed principally, if not solely, with a view to its sedative operation; and it was not until physicians had, by much attention to its effects on the system, until they had found, that by varying the dose, and accommodating it to other circumstances, that it ceased to cause disappointment, and justly to claim our highest encomiums. The same may be said of blisters, bark, mercury, arsenic, sudorifics generally; and, as a case perhaps still more directly in point, I may mention bloodletting, concerning

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concerning which physicians have so long been engaged in controversy. The dispute however seems now pretty generally settled; and its efficacy in many diseases stands unrivalled.
It is my opinion that if the same attention were bestowed on tobacco, it would be found capable of answering many valuable purposes of which we at present know nothing.
We have satisfied ourselves that it is an extremely active plant, that this activity requires much circumspection to prevent its doing harm. It still remains for us to determine some of the states of disease to which it may be adapted, as well as the best method of administering it to obtain all its advantages. By varying the quantity, and by exhibiting it in different ways, its effects will in the same ratio be varied. It is an active Emetic, Cathartic, Antispasmodic, Narcotic, diuretic, diaphoretic, expectorant &c. I do not say stimulant because every one of the above, implies that property.
To notice all of these, separately, would greatly exceed my present limits, and occupy much more time than I have to devote to the subject: what I propose, is, to notice those which are most important, or best known; & in doing this, I shall use as much brevity as is consistent with the importance of

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the inquiry. As an Emetic it was given by a surgeon to a British regiment, at the Cape of Good Hope, in the dose of 6 grains, which acted promptly. This practice was however dictated by necessity; and nothing, I think, short of absolute necessity, will render a repetition or imitation of it, advisable, in ordinary cases. As an external application, to excite vomiting, it has been recommended by high authority. For this purpose the leaves are applied to the region of the stomach as a fomentation or poultice; and this practice has been found very efficacious in those cases of a torpid condition of the stomach in which it was difficult or impossible to excite its action by other means; when, from some cause the patient was unable to swallow emetics; or where they have been swallowed, & from a deficiency of irritability or susceptibility to action, they are slow in producing any effect, especially in case of poisons. It is in cases like these that I imagine tobacco would display its most valuable powers, as an emetic; and is worthy of a trial whenever such may occur. There are other means of emptying the stomach, in such cases, as the Sulphas Zinci, Emetic tartar, and by washing it out by means of a syringe, that may merit our preference; but these may not all be equally accessible; particularly the latter; when tobacco is a valuable auxiliary.

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As a Cathartic I have nothing to advance in its favour, under any circumstances, whilst we have such medicines as Calomel, jalap, rheubarb, & many others in common use.
Its efficacy in relaxing spasm is entitled to our greatest confidence. I know it has been objected that it is a dangerous, & sometimes, even a fatal remedy; but where it has proven so, I think these consequences may be attributed to a want of a due attention to its great activity, and to the proper quantity necessary to produce a given effect. To this may be added the immense difference of strength in different parcels, growing in the same country; and the difference which is said to exist between that of different countries. An infusion made with about a drachm of strong chewing or manufactured tobacco, in one pint of water, will be found sufficient to produce almost any degree of nausea, sickness, and relaxation, provided proper care be observed to prevent evaporation of its volatile and active properties, during its preparation. Without this care we might be often disappointed even with double this quantity.
The infusion of tobacco has been highly recommended in cases of Ileus, and in Incarcerated or strangulated hernia.
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no doubt respecting its efficacy, from its decidedly beneficial effects in its kindred disease, strangulated hernia.

For this I have seen it used but once, & then with the happiest effect. The case to which I allude, occurred to a man aged about seventy-five or eighty. He had been for many years of his life, subject to a recurrence of hernia; so frequently indeed, that he had acquired a facility of reducing it, so that it had never created in him much alarm. From excessive exercise, in a wheatfield, last summer, the disease returned with more than usual violence, and shortly showed symptoms of strangulation, as intolerable pain at the tumour, frequent vomiting, & other appearances common to such cases. On the third or fourth day from the commencement of his illness, his usual means having been ineffectual, he was bled freely, tho' not ad deliquium animi, from an apprehension that he was so much debilitated, both by age & disease, that he could not bear such rigorous practice; the warm bath, opium, position, nauseating doses of emetics, &c. were used, together with the frequent & diligent application of the taxis. By the use of the opium & warm bath the urgency of the symptoms was much abated, but the size of the tumour remained undiminished. He was of the opinion that he should soon be able to accomplish its reduction without further assistance; and

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nothing farther was done towards a cure, until the seventh day of his illness, when I saw him, in company with a young, but intelligent practitioner. We found him apparently fast sinking under his severe sufferings: he had taken no food during his illness, & whenever he had attempted to drink, the water was thrown up as soon as it reached the stomach. During this time nothing had passed through his intestines.
It was the opinion of the attendants that he was actually dying; & from this opinion, we had little cause to dissent; for his pulse was scarcely perceptible, his eyes rolled backwards, & insensible to the presence of flies. In this dilemma, more for the sake of doing something, than from an expectation of success, it was determined to try the effects of tobacco. Accordingly, an infusion was prepared of the strength usually advised, ℥i to 1 pt. of water, and gently simmered in a close vessel 10 or 15 minutes. One half of this quantity was given at first, and, after waiting some time, a considerable degree of additional nausea & gastric distress were observable, but not enabling us to effect a return of the protruding viscera, by the persevered use of the taxis, & position. With some hesitation, the half of the remaining infusion was ordered; shortly afterwards an alarming state of sickness supervened, accompanied by so complete a relaxation as to render the reduction as easy, as it had heretofore been difficult.

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indeed it appeared almost spontaneously to shrink under the taxis, & ascend into the abdomen with a guggling noise. The skin which, previously to the administration of the injection, was dry, and in some parts cold, became suddenly covered with a profuse diaphoresis, appearing first in large drops on the forehead. This sickness lasted but a few hours, when the poor old man was happily restored to health, and the physician as happily relieved from his dreadful state of embarrassment. I think this signal triumph over this formidable disease should encourage physicians and surgeons, particularly those whose fame is yet in embryo, to give it a fair trial, in similar cases, before they resolve on the performance of so nice and so precarious an operation as I conceive that to be for strangulated hernia. Should this supersede the necessity of a surgical operation, as I am persuaded, in many cases, it would do, mankind would thereby be saved a great deal of pain. A discriminating judgment, by a strict examination of existing circumstances, will often be able to distinguish between cases admitting relief by this means, and those demanding a speedy resort to the Knife. When I am thus endeavouring to establish a confidence in this remedy, let me not be understood to rely entirely on it, or to advise it to the exclusion of other means, such as Venesection and the Knife: It is as an auxiliary that I consider it entitled to our confidence.

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in a majority of cases. Besides Ileus and Hernia, there is another condition of things, in which the infusion of tobacco will be found very valuable, in overcoming muscular contraction. I mean as a means of reducing luxations of long standing, and in which the ordinary methods have failed: this has been recommended, & practised by the present professor of Surgery in the University of Pennsylvania, with success. May it not be particularly applicable to those cases of luxation in which very free evacuations had been used without enabling us to replace the bones, and in which, especially in very hot weather, we are afraid to carry them farther lest tetanus might supervene? Such instances however are rare. The antispasmodic property of tobacco has lately been successfully employed in some of the most distressing and intractable affections to which mankind is liable: I allude to several cases related in the Eclectic Repository of Philadelphia for January 1817, as related by the respectable authority of Henry Earle Esq. He used an infusion of tobacco in a number of cases of retention of urine which had resisted, obstinately, other remedies, and with prompt and decidedly beneficial effects in all. He says he was induced to recommend its administration in retention of urine from a spasmodic state of the urethra from its powerful effect in cases of strangulated hernia.

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The same gentleman is inclined to the opinion that much benefit might result from the use of an infusion, the smoke, or, what he thinks would be still better, as more governable in its effects, an extract of tobacco, made into a suppository, and introduced into the rectum, in cases of tetanus, & hydrophobia. In the former of these diseases, he has once used it with a "temporary alleviation of spasm." We are told the Tobacco clyster has cured tetanus in New-England. Tobacco has been strongly recommended as a diuretic in dropsy, upon the authority of Dr. Fowler and others; but I do not believe it possesses any properties entitling it to a preference, either as a diuretic, diaphoretic, or an expectorant. For this reason I would never advise it, while there are other medicines equally efficacious, and much more agreeable. That it might be useful, I have no doubt. Externally applied to the body, in the form of the watery infusion, or in ointment with lard, tobacco is useful in many cutaneous affections, and in the treatment of old and ill-conditioned ulcers. In the form of infusion and in smoke it is capable of destroying or expelling worms, particularly ascarides. In asphyxia from drowning, the smoke of tobacco was formerly employed, introduced into the intestines, but as this was unsuccessful, it has long since been discontinued.

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I am next to notice the effects of tobacco as connected with the practices of smoking, chewing, and snuffing.
Of the prejudicial consequences arising out of these practices, much has been said by different writers, amongst whom is Fullen.
He has accused tobacco of producing a great many baneful effects, amongst which are, from snuffing, its "impairing the memory, occasioning fatuity and other symptoms of a senile or weakened state of the nervous system". The accuracy of this I am much disposed to question, at any rate as a frequent occurrence.
Before attempting to trace the effects of tobacco on the health of those habitually accustomed to its use, I will point out some of the causes that conspired to introduce it as an article of luxury. Of the antiquity of the practice of smoking we have the testimony of the earliest European adventurers to this continent, who describe it as having interwoven itself with the national customs of the aborigines. An article so exceedingly offensive as tobacco must have insinuated itself into use by slow and almost imperceptible degrees.
What were the motives inducing these illiterate tribes to use tobacco would not be easy to determine; but we may suppose their ideas of its effects were not very different from ours.

Some of the causes of its general use amongst civilized nations, I conceive to be the following:

1st. It is used as a stimulant to remove disagreeable debilitating effects generally, & particularly those arising from climate;

2ndly. Many have adopted its use from the influence of fashion, or a spirit of imitation; and,

3rdly Others have used it from a belief that its stimulating influence would secure them against the ravages of contagious diseases, and cure some diseases already contracted.

To strengthen my two first positions I have the high authority of the late Dr. Rush. In his lecture on the pleasures of the senses, commencing with those of Touch, he has said, "They are that degree of sensation in which perfect health, or a regular and natural excitement of the whole system consists.

It is supposed to arise from the secretions being performed in an easy and natural manner. The absence of this natural and healthy degree of excitement is accompanied with pain & debility. The truth of this remark is confirmed by the general use of tobacco, opium, ardent spirits &c. They are all resorted to in order to elevate the system to the point of natural sensation; or to a healthy and natural grade of excitement." Thus much for the former.

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With regard to the second, he observes that "Dr. Johnson has ascribed the use of these artificial means of exciting natural sensation to the predominance of misery over happiness in the world; but I cannot believe this to be the case; for, where one person uses these articles to remove unpleasant sensations from misery, thousands resort to them, in the first instance, from imitation."

As to the influence of fashion, daily observation will support me in the assertion, that there is none too absurd to have followers. If any one doubts this, let him trace to its origin, almost any fashionable article of dress now in vogue.

The third inducement that I have advanced, may, for a moment, excite a smile; but it is well known that a belief in prophylactic medicines has long since been indulged by perhaps a majority of mankind; and, even at the present day, there are not wanting many, who stubbornly persist in the opinion, that it is only by the knowledge and use of prophylactic medicines or means, that physicians approach, with impunity, diseases which popular prejudice has long viewed as contagious.

The truth is, a great many diseases that were once considered highly contagious, even by the best informed physicians, and viewed at a distance with trepidation, by the uninformed, are

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now ascertained to be either not at all contagious, or, if contagious, only at particular stages, or under circumstances favourable to their propagation. This is especially true of plague, yellow-fever, dysentery, &c. and hence a principal source of the belief in prophylactics or antidotes.
The diseases said to be prevented by the habitual use of tobacco, are those of the teeth and gums, catarrhal affections, asthma, & others. That there is in tobacco a property by which the teeth are whitened and preserved, or by which a scorbutic condition of the gums is prevented or corrected, are positions hypothetically assumed, & destitute of any support from experimental evidence. I am prepared to assert from a fair trial on myself, and from much observation on many others. The rheumatic affections of the teeth I am convinced, are often both prevented and cured by chewing tobacco. The powerful stimulus of this article in the mouth, keeps up a perpetual drain from the salivary glands in its vicinity and is thereby serviceable in preventing & curing toothach.
In the form of snuff it is capable, in like manner, of curing or preventing diseases of the head; but there are so many objections to its use, that it should be resorted to with caution. In the first place, the occasional use of snuff is extremely apt

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to create a habit difficult and not always safe to abandon. Cullen says, very truly, that "they are the strong and even disagreable impressions often repeated that give the most tenacious and permanent habits"; and again, that "an especial effect of snuffing, is, its exciting an increased discharge of mucus from the nose, and there have been several instances of headaches, toothaches, & ophthalmias relieved by this means. But it is to be particularly remarked, that, when this discharge is considerable, the ceasing or suppression of it, by abstaining from snuff, is apt to produce the very disorders of headach, toothach, and ophthalmia, which it had formerly relieved."

Independently of these considerations, excessive snuffing is an indelicate and pernicious practice. By the continued application of this powerful stimulant to the schneiderian membrane, the power of perceiving the milder odours is much impaired, if not entirely lost. If the nostrils be impervious to air, as they often must be, we lose entirely the ability to distinguish an agreeable from a disagreeable odour, and thereby curtail, in no inconsiderable degree, our sources of pleasurable sensation. This state of things also induces a necessity of breathing through the mouth; an inconvenience that no one would voluntarily & deliberately incur.

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There are other indelicate consequences attendant upon excessive snuffing, of which I shall say nothing. They are sufficiently obvious to the most superficial observer.

Notwithstanding all that has been written by Cullen and others, concerning the deleterious tendency of chewing & smoking tobacco, it is remarkable, that a large portion of mankind are very much addicted to these practices, and enjoy, I think I may venture to say, an unusual share of health. Witness, for instance, whole nations, as the Dutch, who are proverbially characterized by their love of tobacco, and for their good health.

Witness also sailors generally, than whom there is not perhaps in the world a more healthy and robust set of men.

We might go yet farther, and observe whether those individuals of our own country, and else where, who are daily in the habit of using tobacco, in one or both of these ways, are more liable to disease than other men, under other circumstances.

I believe the result of these observations would be to prove the reverse. I am well apprised of the fact that there are many, whose constitutions would not withstand, without injury, the large use of tobacco, but these I consider either as cases of idiosyncracy, or of unusual irritability, incompatible with strong impressions generally.

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Tobacco, like opium, stramonium, and other articles of the same class, by long continued repetition, loses entirely its narcotic effects on the system, and exerts no other action than that of a gentle stimulant. This is verified by the fact, that there are many persons accustomed to its use, who are in the habit of swallowing the juice, without any manifest inconvenience, either directly or indirectly.

Stramonium has been strongly recommended in spasmodic asthma – reasoning analogically, would it be improbable to infer that smoking and chewing tobacco might be serviceable in that disease? On the contrary, is it not highly probable it would do good?

There is a popular opinion obtaining in some parts of the United States that may merit attention, from the obscurity and vast importance of the diseases which it involves. I allude to the idea that those persons addicted to the practices of smoking and chewing tobacco, are less liable to pulmonary complaints, and especially phthisis pulmonalis, than other people. If this be true, it may lead to some important indication in the treatment of these intractable diseases.

The more modern and more fashionable, as well as the most fascinating method of employing tobacco, is in the form of segars. The most pleasant effect of these is procured by combining with them the exhilarating influence of wine, or some other stimulating drinks. These

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We now view every earthly object in its fairest character, and regard, with double force, the ties of friendship, and the bonds of social obligation; and it is at this crisis that we are peculiarly fitted, by an acquired or preternatural loquacity, for a mutual interchange of sentiment. This happy condition of things is shortly succeeded by one somewhat different, but not less replete with imaginary bliss. I allude to the secondary, or sedative effects of these stimuli:- that calm serenity, that delightful tranquillity, always resulting from an abstraction of superabundant stimuli, during which the veil of oblivion is interposed between us and every recollection that would be productive of melancholy sensations.
The smoke of tobacco is said "to assist reflection: it accompanied Sir Isaac Newton's patient thinking, and added to the wisdom of the politician." The late professor Rush has noticed this property. His words are, "Tobacco acts upon the understanding by its stimulus predominating over all other impressions, which, by distracting sensations, prevent the accumulation of that degree of excitement of the brain, that is favourable to a vigorous and connected train of thought. The wellknown Hobbes always sat in his study, involoped in the smoke

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of ten or twelves pipes of Tobacco. An eminent dissenting clergyman in England, composed a system of divinity, with streams of salivia, impregnated with tobacco issuing from his mouth; and Frederick 2. of Prussia, resorted to a profuse use of tobacco, (in snuff,) to elevate his mind above the pressure of the difficulties & dangers of his last seven years' war." But, continues the same author, "it acts in this way only upon persons accustomed to it." On persons unaccustomed to the use of tobacco, it exerts a very powerful narcotic influence, producing sickness at stomach, vomiting, vertigo, delirium, emaciation, and even death. if rashly persevered in, at first. But as it is my object here, to confine my remarks to its effects on the accustomed, I will conclude by some objections to the habits of smoking and chewing. These, as I have before said, do not appear, generally, to be prejudicial to health. They both however, if long persisted in, permanently contaminate the breath, by imparting to it an offensive smell, and they also are found to induce a dry and unpleasant state of the mouth and fauces by a waste of saliva. Smoking is calculated to injure the teeth, from its heat, and from its acrimonious qualities.

Upon the whole, then, it will appear that I am not disposed to reprobate the moderate use of this article so strongly as has heretofore

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